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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHOLOGY FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF RELI- GIOUS EXPERIENCE

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It is apparent to the most casual observer that religious experience is not peculiar to Christianity. Without attempting to determine how far types of religion other than the Christian are able to realize the power of God, we may admit that among such religious groups there has been a focusing of interest, an absorption of attention, and a control of life's activities quite as great, if not upon as lofty a plane, as in Christianity. We are impressed by the psychological proportions if not by the theological content of non-Christian religious experience. We cannot, however, in this paper, enter that wider field, but must confine our study to what we may term Christian experience, contenting ourselves with the observation that, psychologically, it has a broad context in the non-Christian world.

One day in a great American university a young Jewish rabbi asked a student for the Christian ministry this question, "What is a Christian experience?" While it is not our task in this discussion to formulate the Christian faith, the rabbi's inquiry is pertinent. From a psychological point of view, a Christian experience is a personal reaction toward certain concepts—fundamental among which are: the Christian idea of God, the Christian doctrine of

sin, the Christian view of redemption, the doctrine of the person of Christ; with a consequent adjustment of life to the claims and standards of the Christian community. This conceptual reaction and process of adjustment involve the whole personality, and bring the individual at length into a consciousness of accord with the Christian community and of acceptance with God.

But how is a Christian experience differentiated from other types of religious experience? Not by the psychological processes involved in the reaction, but by the theological content by which the reaction is determined, and by the social consciousness of the group in which the experience is realized. In the case of any religion, where the ideal presented demands it, there will be an emotional stress, a renunciation, a resolution, and a new devotement of life. The type of experience is determined by the conceptual content of the religious presentation and the social consciousness of the religious group. Christianity differs from other religions very widely, both in the content of its presentation and in the character of its group-consciousness. Christian experience thus differs correspondingly from other types of religious experience.

There is a further question concerning religious experience, How is it differ-

entiated from any other kind of experience—from the experience of conjugal love, of filial affection, of patriotism; from an experience of aesthetic values, of impressive scientific realities, of new truths? Again we should say, chiefly by the content of the presentation. Where the presentation is not a mere concept, but is a person, we have, say, human filial devotion on the one hand, and, on the other hand, love to God; in either case a mutual personal relationship. Where the presentation is a mere concept or ideal there is, indeed, an adjustment; but there is no sense of mutuality; it is an individual, interior, subjective experience. In this matter of objectivity, then, Christian experience does not differ from other experience involving either persons or values. Religious experience differs in the content of the presentation which gives rise to it. A wide range of religious experience is possible upon the purely subjective valuational plane—a type of experience dealing not with religious objects but with religious ideas. Even where there is contact, in religious or social experience, with a personal being, the reaction is determined not alone by that being's intrinsic character, but by the subject's notion of that character; so that the subjective element bulks large in all our experience with personalities.

We pass now to a brief characterization of modern psychological points of view. Psychology has ceased to be a merely descriptive science; it has come to a thorough appreciation of the laboratory method. Largely through the use of this method modern psychology has won its present outlook. We shall be able to pass in review briefly four con-

spicuous emphases in contemporary psychological theory: the unitary, the genetic, the voluntaristic, and the social. The first of these, the unitary, has now become quite a commonplace. It stands for the denial of isolated faculties, and consequently for the denial of a special religious faculty; it holds that the whole mind acts in every instance of activity. The implications of this for practical life President King has indicated in his book *Rational Living* (p. 111):

It means . . . that it is a vain delusion to think that one can toy with cynical opinions, and leave feeling and will still humane and sympathetic; that he can indulge in false emotions, and keep thought true and conduct unflecked; that he can choose against reason, and not give his inner creed a twist, and not betray his deepest feeling. It means, on the other hand, that there can be no earnest and persistent search for truth that shall not blossom in truer and more delicate feeling, and fruit in nobler action; that to have done once for all with wrong feeling and sham emotions brings more insight into truth and greater loyalty to it; that one cannot take upon him life's supreme choices and not feel more deeply and think more clearly. It means that defeat in one sphere means defeat in all.

But the unitary point of view implies more than that the whole mind acts in every instance; it means that between states of consciousness and the inner functional conditions of the body, particularly of the brain and nervous system, there is a regular and uniform connection—a psycho-physical parallelism of some sort—so that "every psychosis has its neurosis," whether the converse be true or not. This is far from maintaining, as did Maudsley, that conscious-

ness is a mere epi-phenomenon, a by-product of the brain; it does not deny an independent potentiality to spirit. But it does insist upon a close relation between function and structure, a dependence of the normality of the psychic organization upon the normality of the physical structure; and declares that habits—a synthesis of which reveals character—have their physical basis. The localization of brain functions, the observed relation of disturbed circulation to abnormal conduct, the effect of fatigue upon morality, and the relation of fine physical tone to clear and conclusive thinking go far to confirm this view. This means that no thorough reckoning with that totality of consciousness which we are wont to call “soul” can safely ignore the bodily conditions. If, to quote President King once more¹, “self-control lies at the basis of character, and . . . the chief psychical condition of self-control is the power of attention, [and] the chief bodily condition of the power of attention is . . . surplus nervous energy, [and] the conditions of nervous energy are . . . food, rest, recreation, sleep” (together with the avoidance of emotional excess), then it must be clear that character and the normal functioning of the physical man are closely related.

The genetic conception found its place in the field of psychological theory following the general acceptance by the natural sciences of the theory of development. This point of view is responsible, not only for the employment of the genetic concept in general, but for the rise of comparative psychology, of child

psychology, and of “race” psychology. From being a science of the static, cross-sectioning adult human life for its disclosure of the normal, psychology became a genetic science, recognizing that “normality” is relative and applies rather to process than to status. The question of normality is not answered by describing characteristic behavior upon a single level of life; it depends rather upon the co-ordination and harmonized unfolding of life’s elements, however meager or immature, at any given stage.

The genetic conception prepares us to discover in the so-called human instincts a body of tendencies long serviceable in the interest of the organism at earlier stages—a body of tendencies which have need to be disciplined, inhibited, or sublimated in the interest of higher needs, for the simple reason that the psychophysical organism is a developing organism and is constantly discovering higher needs. In the field of child psychology the genetic conception prepares us to differentiate stages of development. We have come to see that the child is in no sense a “little man,” for he differs from the adult not only in the size but in the proportion of parts, in the relative magnitude of vital organs, in the physiological processes of circulation, digestion, and respiration, and even more radically in the basis and organization of the mental life. Thus, in the field of religion, we are prepared—as in the whole complex of his expanding personal life—to follow the child through the successive phases of instinct, habit, sentiment, will, and thought, until at length he reaches maturity.

¹ *Rational Living*, p. 74.

One scarcely need call attention to the emphasis of modern psychology upon will and action. While we need not suppose that single acts exhaust character or ever fully reveal it, it is equally vain to suppose that human nature is essentially other than what it appears in action—that the individual may have a developed esoteric nature quite other and better than his particular acts indicate. The voluntaristic emphasis roots in the biological view of man as a behaving organism to whom action is the essential thing—the specific line of action being determined by the needs of the organism, as well as by its immediate environment. In this view the whole complex of inherited tendency—broadly denominated instinct—is a series of congenital tendencies to action. As James says, “the whole neural organism is, psychologically considered, but a machine for converting stimuli into reactions.” The development, not to say the very life, of the organism is bound up with action. This is true of mental none the less than of muscular life. Activity is the core of will, while ideation and feeling are secondary, arising when the activity is blocked, and then only in the interest of opening fresh paths of action. The justification of the laboratory method not only in science but in religion as well may well rest upon the fact that we cannot know the essential character of any vital entity until we know it in action. Thought and emotion reach their highest levels only as accompanying a definite program of action. Knowledge is thus not only an accompaniment of action, it is—as Dewey says—“a statement of it.” We know the quality

of emotions only in the experience of them, the power of will only in the exercise of it, the adequacy of an idea only in its testing; in a word, self-consciousness is properly an awareness of ourselves as active in relation to ends. Thus action is essence, and deeds are revelatory; for “by their fruits ye shall know them.”

A final emphasis in modern psychology is upon the social factor in experience. It has scarcely been realized to what extent social suggestion determines the content of individual consciousness. Society contributes the *milieu* into which the child is born; it supplies him with language, with an organized technique of life, and with a system of ideals. Society cannot, as Baldwin points out,¹ be conceived merely “as a loose aggregate made up of a number of biological individuals. It is rather a body of mental products, an established network of psychical relationships,” by which the new person is molded and shaped to his maturity. “The self is a gradually forming nucleus within the mind; a mass of feeling, effort, and knowledge. It grows in feeling by contagion; in knowledge by imitation; in will by opposition and obedience.” The consciousness and hence the course of action of an individual are modified, limited, and directed, to a great extent, by those of his particular social group. While there is doubtless no independent social mind, no *âme collective*, there is an authoritative demand of the group consciousness upon the individual; and he is as truly indebted to society for his ideas as for his physical origin, for his particular type of religion as for the cut of his clothes.

¹ *History of Psychology*, II, 130.

It is the significance of psychology as interpreted by these four emphases which we wish to consider in relation to the understanding of religious experience. This discussion must be limited to but three phases of religious experience, relating it to childhood, to the maturing life, and to the social group formed by the religious community.

1. Psychology and the Interpretation of the Religion of Childhood

Accepting such a definition of personality as involves at least the factors of self-consciousness and self-determination with a view to moral ends, psychology recognizes that the young child is only a "candidate for personality." The period of human infancy is vastly more prolonged than that of any other species, and instinct alone is proportionately less capable of supplying the organization which life upon the human plane demands. Nevertheless, the human infant begins life through activity which is merely spontaneous, and that activity is shaped by instinct. Biologically considered, the activities in which he engages are such as tend to promote the well-being of the organism. Instinct urges activity in three directions, being manifest in motor tendencies which result in the co-ordination and control of all necessary motor processes; in mental tendencies which involve attention, retention, assimilation, etc., and which result in the co-ordination and control of all necessary mental processes; and, finally, in emotional tendencies—the pleasure-pain series—which have to do with the welfare of the organism. Activities co-ordinated under the push of

these instinctive tendencies become habits. Instinct from within and social discipline from without are the chief, if not the only, determinants of these early habits. Gradually, however, the child passes from the life of mere instinct to the life of intelligence. Inner tendency reaches out through curiosity, imitation, sympathy, etc., and lays hold upon the elements of environment and organizes them into a growing experience; outer conditions close in upon inner tendency, discipline it, direct it, control it; and they thus both limit and enrich experience. The focus of childhood experience lies in action; and the activities of a little child are fragmentary, transitory, immediate, selfish. Up to nine years of age or thereabouts, the child attains no large organization of experience, but little well-defined imagery, and no considerable appreciation of ideals.

Much has been written about the nature of the child which views it as a static affair. There have been two chief views, each of which is psychologically wide of the mark. On the one hand it has been held that the child is organically predisposed to evil by virtue of an essentially evil nature inherited from his forbears; on the other hand that he is born in a state of moral perfection. But, as a matter of fact, the young child, measured by adult standards, has no moral status; he is a candidate for morality, as he is for personality. As to his original nature, which may here be viewed as the complex of his inherited tendencies, it must be admitted that it proves to be, as Professor Thorndyke says,¹ "very often and very much im-

¹ *Educational Psychology*, I, 280.

perfect and wrong." This is simply to say that the child's original equipment is archaic, adapted to the needs of life upon a lower level of existence. Instincts of this sort, unless sublimated and disciplined through the social process, can issue only in making the individual an enemy to society. Professor Thorndyke's statement is axiomatic, that "instincts may be trusted to form desirable social habits only under strong social pressure, whereby the wants of one are accommodated to the wants of all."

The fact that the child does not in any large measure pass beyond the non-moral status up to nine years of age or so does not mean that religion is no concern of his. These years are richly opportune for the formation of certain right religious habits, for the actual doing of specific right things. If in the narrow world of his experience the child has the daily presentation of the fact of law, a law higher even than the will of his parents, and to which they, too, are subject; if he comes to recognize, in however fragmentary and inadequate a fashion, a heavenly Father whose knowledge and will compass life about; he is making fundamental progress in religion. Thus the code of the home and the code of the school will come to have an ideal reinforcement, though as yet its influence can be but secondary. Happy the child who cannot remember a time when all this was strange to him! Happy the child whose habitual reactions, the sum of which will ultimately constitute his character, are formed amid such influences!

In early childhood there is needed not repression so much as the wholesome discipline of adequate direction; and in later childhood, in Coe's terms, "the will of the child, now coming to itself, should be trained through the fellowship of obedience, the fellowship of labor, the fellowship of play, and the fellowship of worship."¹ The mature life must mingle with the interests and occupations of the immature; and this principle applies through adolescence as well as in childhood. Religious education cannot be viewed as a cold, abstract, merely theoretical oversight of the mental and moral development of childhood and youth; it is rather the vital sharing of a common world of activity and interest. In proportion as life is thus shared with maturity will childhood and adolescence, according to the measure of their needs, derive both a sufficient structure of belief and a wholesome habit of will, suffused by the atmosphere of emotion which close personal relationships supply. We may agree with Ames,² that "the child up to about thirteen years of age . . . is religious in the degree and to the extent to which his power and experience enable him to enter into the religious values of his social environment or to find such values in his community life," and no farther. It is particularly true of childhood and youth that "religion changes its form and content as life changes."

The important service which genetic psychology has rendered is in assuring the recognition in the growing child of certain stages to which we must adapt

¹ *Education in Religion and Morals*, p. 243.

² *The Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. 206.

our ideal and method, and by which we must regulate our demands upon him. For the first dozen years the important thing is the formation of right habits, "since they will determine motives and ideals." Results during these years come almost wholly through environment and training. Accordingly we should aim less at giving the children a course of theological instruction or at making them consciously and subjectively religious, and more at giving them a share in worship and the forms of religion, at teaching them reverence, at developing truly moral habits.

2. Psychology and an Interpretation of the Religion of the Maturing Life

There is a great transition in the developing life at entrance upon adolescence. The outstanding feature of this is a thoroughgoing physical reorganization. It is the period of pubescence. Here "the life of the mere individual ceases and the life of the race begins." G. Stanley Hall puts the transition into these terms:

Before this age the child lives in the present, is normally selfish, deficient in sympathy, but frank and confidential, obedient to authority, and without affectation, save the supreme affectation of childhood—viz., that of assuming the words, manners, habits, etc., of those older than itself. But now stature suddenly increases and the power of physical and mental endurance and effort diminishes for a time; the larynx, nose, and chin change, and normal and morbid ancestral traits and features appear. Far greater and more protracted are the changes which take place in the nervous system, both in the development of the cor-

tex and expansion of the convolutions and the growth of association fibers by which the elements shoot together and relations of things are seen which hitherto seemed independent, to which it seems as if for a few years the energies of growth were directed. Hence this period is so critical and changes in character so rapid.¹

The sex element of adolescent nature is far more important and fundamental in the control of adolescent thought and feelings than we have been wont to think, and there is grave danger that it may develop out of proportion and prematurely. To a very large degree the spiritual development of the adolescent is contingent upon a normal physical development. The dawning parental instinct gives rise to certain altruistic activities the implications of which the youth does not yet understand. The psycho-physical point of view is the only sufficient approach to the religious experience of adolescence, for the individualizing and socializing processes, which go forward hand in hand, are physically conditioned. It is in the light of the relation between the physical and spiritual aspects of development thus indicated, and in the light of the social function which the youth is preparing to perform, that we shall come to understand why adolescence is "pre-eminently the period of the rise of religious consciousness in the individual." Conversion, in the broader sense of the term, as marking the beginning of personal religious experience, is primarily an adolescent phenomenon. It is a commonplace that by far the greater proportion of religious awakenings date between the ages of twelve and twenty.

¹ *Youth*, pp. 359 f.

There is quite general recognition of three culminating points in the adolescent period at which religious committal is likely to occur. The ages which we note here are those at which boys commonly manifest this interest; girls tend to mature somewhat earlier, and the age of decision is correspondingly affected by this consideration. The first decision period is at the age of twelve years, or thereabout, and connects with entrance upon puberty. In the judgment of Coe and others, it is the "normal age for religious decision," if such an age can be distinguished. When religious committal does occur at this age it is likely to be connected with the influence of the gang, for this is a period of "great impressionability and responsiveness to suggestion." This age is also one of a beginning emotional flux, and religious decision may have a rather strong feeling accompaniment. The second, and the most prominent, period of religious decision, under present conditions, comes at about the age of sixteen. The "physical and psychical ferment" of adolescence is at its height. The youth begins to individualize, he becomes self-assertive, and not infrequently sets himself against the constituted authority. Religious advance is now chiefly by the way of committal, a definite, willed devotement of life to God—a "ratification rather than a reversal" of such religious experience as his earlier training has led him into. The third period falls at about the age of nineteen. The intellectual element comes to the fore now; there is apt to be a time of wrestling with doubt ere the youth arrives at a religious resolution. All committal at this age involves a

considerable element of insight. It is to be remarked concerning these three periods that if a youth reaches religious decision in the first of them, he may yet be liable, at each of the later stages, to a crisis affecting some one or other phase of his religious life. Such a crisis is, however, likely to be less significant if the main question of religious committal is out of the way. In middle or later adolescence there is likely to be associated with the religious crisis a kindred vocational crisis. Sometimes the two are very intimately related, so much so that the religious decision is paramount to a vocational decision.

The psychology of religion enables us to interpret religious committal as a most significant and determining part of the total process of adjustment to the world-order. We recognize that there are certain "nascent periods" in the growth of the soul—tides which, "taken at the flood," lead on to God and the Christian life. And we see that the task of religious education during these years is that of stimulating and directing youth in this whole process of self-realization and self-adjustment. It would be relatively easy to bring great numbers of children into the church prematurely. They cannot, however, be brought to God—in the child's way—too early. To bring them into the church much before the period of adolescence is not only to make no added contribution to their religious experience but also to rob them of that significance which public committal can have only at a later age. To lay too much stress upon the emotional accompaniment of such committal in adolescence is a further mistake, for a highly

emotional experience in these years usually implies that a cataclysmic adult experience has been held up as the standard, or that religious training in childhood has been almost wholly wanting; it may imply both of these. Adolescent religious committal ought not to be primarily an emotional matter.

The point of view which has been taken in this paper regards adolescent "conversion"—I prefer the term *religious committal*—as normal, and the adult experience as abnormal. In the one case the process has been so delayed that it must be reconstructive, must tear down and build over; while in the other case it has come early enough to be properly constructive, integrating with the primary bent of personality the great controlling religious motives. This fact should go far toward determining the place of emphasis in the minister's effort—whether upon continuous educational evangelism or upon occasional adult evangelism.

However, as things are in our world, there is no likelihood of the need for a proper adult evangelism passing. Adult conversion has usually and typically represented but one possible sort of mature religious transformation—the cataclysmic. That there is another, less emotional in its background, less climactic, more a matter of conscious will and the building up piece by piece of a new set of habits in religion, there can be no question. This is the sort of conversion through which alone those individuals less susceptible to social suggestion must enter the religious life, if they enter it at all in maturity. However, it is the passive, emotional, suggestible type of

personality which is more apt to go to extremes in those forms of sinful indulgence which rapidly disintegrate and degrade the whole personality; and hence this type is more often found in the rescue mission and is more easily reached, when present in evangelistic meetings, by the usual evangelistic methods. There can be no doubt that the cataclysmic type of experience is supremely valuable for this passive, emotional, suggestible sort of individual. The cataclysmic type of religious transformation is usually contingent upon some intense emotional experience precipitated by a more or less continued stress of social suggestion. Colvin and Bagley remark of such an experience:

The religious emotion, considered in itself, is a disorganizing experience; it brings about a temporary chaos; but if from this travail of soul there be born a better life, then the emotion has value. . . . The old and harmful habits that have dulled the mind and mechanized the behavior are at least temporarily obliterated, and the opportunity is thus offered for a new start and the gradual formation of a new set of habits and new attitudes of mind.¹

We shall agree that the value of such an emotional experience depends almost wholly upon "the effective development of habits belonging to a good character." The failure of the churches in the back-country—where the annual "big meetin'" is the rule—to recognize this fact has made it the regular thing for some belated souls to "get religion" every year. The failure of our city churches to develop a technique for meeting this need has greatly limited the usefulness of the customary mass-

¹ *Human Behavior*, p. 90.

evangelism, and in part explains the large proportion of lapses.

3. Psychology and the Understanding of Religious Groups

Social psychology gives us a point of view which is essential in our consideration of religious groups. We have not sufficiently considered the influence of that network of relationships into which every child is born, the power of the social group over the individual, the limits of individuality in the average man. Society supplies him with language, lore, ideals, patterns, technique, friendships, incentives, arena. He makes some small contribution of initiative, combination, application, integration; but how largely he lives within the boundaries of established custom he probably never realizes. If we were to dismiss the matter with a mere allusion to organized society as a whole, we should miss the main point; for the power which regulates the bulk of life for the individual is not that of society as a whole, but that of some minor social group or other. Its contribution is, therefore, fractional and fragmentary, and not at all a combination of the best achievements of the race. With such training the individual is a provincial, speaks a dialect rather than a language, is at home in but a restricted area of life, and welcome there only upon his own social level; he is a partisan in politics and a sectarian in religion, quite as conventional in activities as he is restricted in horizon. The members of such a minor social group are interested chiefly in the maintenance of its standards; they seek quite naturally to conform each member thereto.

This is true within the area of religion. Both the group and the individual are quite conventional in their judgments of propriety and duty. Group consciousness and individual conscience work together to keep the individual conformed to group standards. There is thus a limit imposed beyond which the principle of variation scarcely carries the average individual. There are in general two typical variations. The first of these is of the motor type, where the course of conduct is largely determined by "unreasoned promptings, instinctive impulses, by habits which [the individual] has formed, and . . . by auto-suggestion." Here native impulse may carry the individual quite wide of the type; yet such variations occur rather in the line of activity than in the region of thought. The second typical variation occurs with what we may term "the mature mind," though it does not always occur even here. There is a type of maturity which may be termed moral rather than intellectual. It is, however, with the intellectual sort of maturity that variations from type in the field of religion are apt to occur. The individual seeks to analyze situations for himself, and shapes his technique of control in the light of his own analysis. Where sufficient numbers are engaged in such a process they tend naturally to form a new group; yet quite usually this process goes on within the older group, with the result in time of modifying and liberalizing its standards.

The minor social group will continue to exert an influence in religion not less potent, but—let us hope—more intelligent, and—because it makes room for

more than one type of religious experience—more liberal. It must allow for the rights of individuality in religion; it should guarantee the right of the individual to have an original and unique experience of God. Every religious group needs to recognize the possibility of other avenues of approach to God and of other types of religious experience than those most in evidence within its own ranks, types of religious experience which may be equally Christian. In order to determine norms of experience, the minor religious group must base its inductions upon a wider field of experience than its own. It must continually seek a more adequate definition of religious ideals and a technique better adapted for their realization. So much for the relation of religious groups to the individual.

But we are interested in the religious groups themselves. Sectarianism is not a phenomenon peculiar to Christianity, nor, indeed, to religion. In accounting for the early diversity of Christian beliefs, we have too largely overlooked the religious variety already present in the Graeco-Roman world. The rule of that world was syncretism; and, though Christianity formally abjured the notion, she could not escape the influence of the syncretistic habit. Nor could she escape the philosophic bias, ingrained in some of her adherents before their conversion. Nor could she escape the ritualistic bent and interest of other converts. Now that Graeco-Roman world was far more provincial than the world of our day; and Christianity was rapidly assuming provincial dress and learning the vernacular when ecclesiastical authority decided that Christianity should be

ecumenical. In harmony with that decision, Christianity became a creed and an institution; but, even so, individuality continued to score. Underground, secretly, in remote districts; persecuted, proscribed, martyred, the sects framed their faith and met the religious needs of their adherents. They proved once for all that Christianity can never become ecumenical by becoming rigid. The Reformation was but one phase of a combined economic, social, and religious upheaval in a world grown rigid. It was a tremendous and unforgettable demonstration of the close proximity of all social interests, economic demands, cultural ideals, and religion. They cannot be maintained in unaffected isolation. The economic needs of a given group, and its cultural ideals, will largely determine the bent of its religion; and the attempt to conform any such group to a procrustean bed of uniformity is utterly vain.

The old ecumenicalism based upon ecclesiastical authority; the newer ecumenicalism based upon the authority of the Bible. But the Bible, being a transcript of life, could but embody the differences as well as the fundamental agreements of the Hebrew and Christian religions. As a matter of fact, the sects to a large degree fixed upon the differences rather than the fundamental agreements, and erected certain of those differences into static norms by which the conduct of all coming ages should be determined. The spectacle of some scores of Protestant bodies, each appealing to the Bible as its warrant, and yet each emphasizing some variant aspect of biblicism, was the actual outcome. Such was a considerable factor in the

religious inheritance of the present generation. Yet the sects were a fact before the Reformation. They were and are inevitable in a provincial world. Not only do the provincialism and inertia attaching to all institutions assist in their perpetuation; they are reinforced by certain racial and temperamental differentiations. We may be sure that until humanity shares in a common culture, common social ideals, and a religion of the spirit, we shall have the Christian sects—though not all of them, let us hope!

We need not too greatly lament the fact of past or present sectarianism, as though it were an isolated phenomenon. As a matter of fact, all life has to a large degree borne that aspect; it has been provincial, partisan, and sectarian, with respect to all the chief social interests. Yet, in spite of this, the goods of life have been achieved. Progress is possible in a sectarian world; and perhaps a greater total area of experience has been developed than any artificial ecumenicalism in religion would ever have allowed. However, there are forces at work in our modern world which must in the end largely eliminate or neutralize sectarianism. There is a rapid universalizing of both ideal and achievement. Ideas, social ideals, culture, inventions, the technique of science, and the fundamentals of life, more largely than ever before in human history, are ignoring boundaries and becoming the inherit-

ance of diverse races and civilizations. The parliament of man is no mere visionary's dream. The day of the only possible ecumenical Christianity is hastening; for there can never be a truly ecumenical Christianity until there is in some sense an ecumenical social order, an ecumenical culture, and an ecumenical life of the spirit in its broader context. Yet that ecumenicalism will differ from the older ideal in discarding a rigid uniformity, in recognizing as legitimate not the accidental differences of the historic sects, but the essential differences of individuality, temperament, sex, race, degree of culture, and measure of immediate need. It will be no absolutism of the spirit, reducing all religious life to a dead level of uniformity; it will be rather a democracy of the spirit, in which the variant types of religious experience and variant modes of approach to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ shall find a place. Such an ecumenical Christianity will be a brotherhood of mutual respect, of hearty co-operation toward common ends, and of greatly enriched individual experience. Such an ecumenical Christianity is in process today, thank God! under the impulse of the new era in Missions, of the new social consciousness whose goal is the kingdom of God, and of the new science whose function it is to subdue and organize reality in the interest of the life of the spirit.